

# Is Democracy a Prerequisite for Economic Growth? A Sectoral Analysis of Authoritarian Capitalism in Rwanda's Coffee Sector

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**Abstract:** The question of whether democracy is needed as a prerequisite for growth is highly debated within the development field. The rapid growth of the East Asian “miracle” economies has questioned the necessity of democracy in producing growth outcomes, with growing literature supporting the notion of authoritarian-led growth. This paper will analyze the evidence behind the widening acceptance of authoritarian capitalism and its application in Rwanda’s coffee sector. The findings will indicate that although democracy is indeed not a prerequisite for growth, long term economic sustainability is reliant on continued liberalization of markets and improved personal freedoms, ultimately leading to a transition to democracy.

**Keywords:** Rwanda, democracy, economic growth, authoritarian capitalism, coffee.

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## Introduction

The debate concerning democracy and economic growth is much like that of the chicken and the egg: which comes first? In her 2018 book, *The Edge of Chaos*, Dambisa Moyo proposes that “economic growth is a prerequisite for democracy and not the other way around.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the question of democracy as a prerequisite for growth is highly contested, particularly given the success of the East Asian “miracle” countries whose growth is largely credited to authoritarian regimes. Rwanda has modelled this approach, coined “Africa’s Singapore,”<sup>2</sup> having grown its economy significantly since Paul Kagame took power in 2000. GDP has risen from \$1.8 billion USD in 2000 to \$9.5 billion in 2018. This growth is largely attributed to Rwanda’s fixation on Singapore’s growth model, a model that combines authoritarian political ideology with liberalized market capitalism.

This essay will explore Moyo’s claim for the need of a benevolent dictator to promote economic development through an analysis of authoritarian capitalism in Rwanda’s coffee sector. Rwanda’s coffee sector experienced a significant overhaul under the autocratic

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1 Dambisa Moyo, *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth - and How to Fix It*. (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

2 Julian Hatter, “Kagame Seems Set to Win Again in Rwanda. But Is He a ‘miracle Man’ or a Nascent Dictator?” *The Washington Post*, 2017.

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leadership of President Paul Kagame, that aimed to innovate the sector and promote incentive for growth. Although this overhaul was government led, liberalized policies enabled the sector to experience growth. Today, however, continued government control over the sector has proved consequential and without further liberalization and response to demands for enhanced freedoms, the sector could continue to stifle.

The first section of this essay will explore the notion of economic growth as a prerequisite to democracy, noting the historical trends of countries that have followed this method to facilitate economic growth, namely the East Asian “miracle” economies. The second section will explore the arguments against this method of growth, instead prioritizing democratic stability ahead of capitalist economic measures. The third section will explore these arguments through a case study of Rwanda’s coffee sector, which has seen significant growth under authoritarian capitalism. The fourth section analyzes the long-term implications of this economic growth model and how democracy will need to be integrated to ensure the sector’s stability and continued development over time.

### **Economic Growth as a Prerequisite to Democracy**

Among the Western world, democracy is heralded as a solution to the problems of underdevelopment. Democracy has been argued to be the “economic salvation” for developing countries, a catalyst for battling “corruption, economic cronyism, and anticompetitive and inefficient practices.”<sup>3</sup> However, evidence illustrates that democracy can sustain itself longer as per capita income increases<sup>4</sup> and this notion calls into question whether democracy is needed at all to induce economic growth. The East Asian “miracle” economies represent a widely used example as to why democracy is not a prerequisite to economic growth. Examples including Indonesia, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore demonstrate that, as Moyo notes, a ‘decisive benevolent dictator’ is what poorer countries need to get the economy moving.<sup>5</sup> The ‘benevolent dictators’ credited to promulgating economic growth in these countries, including Suharto in Indonesia, Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Park Chung Hee in South Korea aimed to “ensure some semblance of property rights, functioning institutions, growth-promoting economic policies and an investment climate that buttressed growth.”<sup>6</sup> Selective interventionism in specific sectors, including electronic components in South Korea<sup>7</sup> and communications and information technology in Taiwan<sup>8</sup> for example, combined with large-scale investment and prioritization in

3 Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is Another Way for Africa*. (London: Penguin, 2010), 41.

4 Dambisa Moyo, *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth - and How to Fix It*. (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 42.

5 Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid : Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is Another Way for Africa*. (London: Penguin, 2010), 42.

6 Ibid, 42-43.

7 Luis Suarez-Villa and Han Pyo-Hwan, “The Rise of Korea’s Electronics Industry: Technological Change, Growth, and Territorial Distribution.” *Economic Geography* 66, no. 3 (1990): 273-92.

8 Eunice Hsiao-Hui Wang, “ICT and Economic Development in Taiwan: Analysis of the

education led to increased productive growth in these economies.<sup>9</sup> These measures are significant, not only because they lifted millions out of poverty, but also because these measures were enacted while still limiting social and political freedom. From suppressing freedom of expression in South Korea<sup>10</sup> to banning chewing gum in Singapore,<sup>11</sup> these governments prioritized the growth of the economy while undermining basic freedoms.

Economist Dambisa Moyo, at the forefront of the anti-democracy growth theory, challenges the viability of democracy when economic growth levels are low.<sup>12</sup> She suggests that the West's insistence on political rights as a precursor for economic growth is misguided.<sup>13</sup> Moyo argues that for those in dire poverty, essential needs like food and water take priority over social desires like freedom and democracy.<sup>14</sup> Further Moyo argues that not even the West implemented full democratic rights for all its citizens during its economic development and that those who are considered democratic "have become so illiberal that they're indistinguishable from authoritarian regimes."<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, Moyo posits a compelling case against democracy as a prerequisite for growth, and as Alamdari notes economies have the ability to grow under any political system, be it democratic or authoritarian, so long as well-defined social and legal systems are present.<sup>16</sup> Consistent with Moyo, Alamdari argues in favor of economic development as a precursor for a stable democracy, preceding social advancement.<sup>17</sup> Despite the well-known evidence of the "Asian Tiger" economies that scholars often point to argue against democracy as a prerequisite for growth, there is still much resistance to this proposal. The next section will explore critiques of this position, as well as analyze what evidence the data reveals about democracy and its correlation with growth.

## Democracy as a Prerequisite to Economic Growth

Easterly analyzes the anti-democracy growth theory by leveraging Polity data to correlate positive-growth relationships with long term democracy.<sup>18</sup> He notes that those countries that did grow under authoritarianism are not adequately representative of disasters that

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Evidence." *Telecommunications Policy* 23, no. 3 (1999).

9 The World Bank, 1993. *East Asian Miracle*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

10 Isabella Steger, "The Legacy Park Geun-Hye Leaves behind in Korea's 30-Year Democracy Is a More Authoritarian State." Quartz. Quartz, March 15, 2017.

11 Elle Metz, "Why Singapore Banned Chewing Gum." BBC News. BBC, March 28, 2015.

12 Alice Hu, "A Look at Global Economic Growth: An Interview with Dambisa Moyo." *Harvard International Review* 37, no. 1 (2015): 43.

13 Dambisa Moyo, *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth - and How to Fix It*. (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

14 Ibid, 112.

15 Ibid, 120.

16 Kazem Alamdari. "Is Democracy A Prerequisite of Economic Growth?" *Michigan Sociological Review*, no. 8 (1994): 20.

17 Ibid, 21.

18 William Russell Easterly, *The White Man's Burden : Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done so Much Ill and so Little Good*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44.

have occurred under dictatorships.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the authoritarian regimes of Kim Jong-Il's North Korea, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, and Omar Hassan Al-Bashir's Sudan not only disintegrated any resemblance of an economy, but also precipitated grave human rights abuses throughout the duration of their regimes. Certainly, such practices are not conducive to economic growth. Easterly argues that the success of autocrats "does not imply that autocracy delivers rapid growth," but rather, indicates that "these growth episodes happened in spite of autocrats, not because of them."<sup>20</sup> However, Easterly acknowledges that this analysis does not assume the benevolence of autocratic leaders<sup>21</sup> although this point is key in distinguishing whether economic growth can be successful under autocrats. As noted by The World Bank, the regimes of the East Asian miracle economies, although autocratic, were "willing to grant a voice and genuine authority to a technocratic elite and key leaders of the private sector. Unlike authoritarian leaders in many other economies, leaders in the HPAEs [high performing East Asian economies] realized that economic development was impossible without cooperation."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, as noted by Behuria, insecurity in their position as leaders necessitates that ruling elites maintain their economic goals.<sup>23</sup> As argued by Behuria, this vulnerability forces elites to commit to delivering economic development. The approach towards recognizing this vulnerability indicates whether a government will define its rule with benevolence or malevolence. Oftentimes, a government's stability is dependent on its response to the economic needs of its people, meaning that a disciplined approach is required for sustainable rule. For authoritarian capitalism, an approach that combines authoritarian political ideology with a liberalized market economy, to be effective and for productivity to be achieved in sectors "governments must build alliances with capitalists,"<sup>24</sup> This counterpoise between governments defining sectoral planning for economic growth and capitalists executing those plans leads the type of growth that has occurred in the East Asian miracle economies.

The data demonstrates that economies that utilized the authoritarian capitalism model, namely the East Asian miracle economies, demonstrate a transition to democracy over time as the country develops. Using Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Indonesia as examples, since their rapid development under autocratic rulers, these countries have widely improved on the EIU's Democracy Index<sup>25</sup> and within the Human

19 William Easterly, *The Tyranny of Experts : Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor*. (New York: Basic Books, a Member of the Perseus Book Group, 2013), 308.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid, 309.

22 The World Bank, 1993. *East Asian Miracle*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).

23 British Behuria, "Between Party Capitalism and Market Reforms – Understanding Sector Differences in Rwanda". *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 53 (3): 418.

24 Ibid.

25 "The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index", The Economist Newspaper, Accessed February 16, 2020, <https://infographics.economist.com/2019/DemocracyIndex/>.

Freedom Index,<sup>26</sup> ranking higher than many Western countries in terms of economic freedom. Related to economic freedom, Singapore (ranked 8.84/10) ranks higher than a number of Western countries including the UK (8.0), Switzerland (8.39), Netherlands (7.71), Denmark (7.77), Ireland (8.07), Finland (7.65), Norway (7.60), Germany (7.69), and the United States (8.03). All five countries have demonstrated increased standing in personal freedoms as well since the 2015 report.<sup>27</sup> In 2018, the Human Freedom Index indicated a personal freedom ranking for Taiwan at 9.04 when compared to Western countries like Ireland (8.94) and the United States (8.75) who ranked lower on personal freedom.<sup>28</sup> Singapore and South Korea are on par with Western countries on the personal freedom scale, ranking at 7.48 and 8.77, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Although Indonesia and Malaysia trail further behind on the personal freedom scale (6.38 and 5.90) and the economic freedom scale (7.16 and 6.92), they have still made marked improvements over the last several years.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index indicates that all four of these countries have transitioned to either a flawed democracy or a full democracy since their economies first began growth under authoritarian regimes.<sup>31</sup> This indicates that indeed, as Moyo posits, the model of authoritarian capitalism, led by a benevolent dictator, not only precipitates economic growth, but in the long run, as noted by Alamdari<sup>32</sup> and Moyo,<sup>33</sup> enables democracy to flourish and sustain.

Given the growing literature that supports the notion that democracy is not necessary for economic growth, but in fact, that economic growth acts as a facilitator to achieving democracy, many developing countries have used the East Asian miracle economies as an example for developing their own economies. China, as an example, under authoritarian capitalism, has achieved rapid economic growth since the 1980's, with GDP reaching \$13.6 trillion in 2018, the second largest in the world next to the US.<sup>34</sup> Rwanda has also begun to model this approach in its quest to grow its economy. The next section will explore how Rwanda's application of authoritarian capitalism in its coffee sector has precipitated significant growth and demonstrate how, as the sector becomes well-established, a response to demands of increasing freedoms and liberalization within the

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26 "Human Freedom Index, 2019" Cato Institute, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/cato-human-freedom-index-update-3.pdf>.

27 "Human Freedom Index 2015," Cato Institute, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/human-freedom-index-2015.pdf>

28 "Human Freedom Index, 2019" Cato Institute, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/cato-human-freedom-index-update-3.pdf>.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 "The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index", The Economist Newspaper, Accessed February 16, 2020, <https://infographics.economist.com/2019/DemocracyIndex/>.

32 Kazem Alamdari. "Is Democracy a Prerequisite of Economic Growth?" *Michigan Sociological Review*, no. 8 (1994).

33 Dambisa Moyo, *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth - and How to Fix It*. (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

34 "GDP (current US \$)", World Bank Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

sector could ensure its sustainability in the long term.

### **Authoritarian Capitalism in Rwanda's Coffee Sector**

Since Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame, took power in the early 2000s, following the devastating genocide that took place in the mid 1990s, his presidency has marked both significant social improvements between the Hutu and Tutsi communities, as well as notable levels of economic growth in the country. Dubbed "Africa's Singapore,"<sup>35</sup> Rwanda has grown from GDP of \$1.8 billion in 2000 to \$9.5 billion in 2019.<sup>36</sup> Rwanda's leading sectors, including energy, agriculture, trade, hospitality, and financial services accounted for \$995.7 million of exports in 2018, increasing 5.5 per cent year-on-year.<sup>37</sup> Rwanda's investment in the agricultural sector accounted for nearly 10 per cent of its annual budget in 2012, demonstrating its prioritization to improve productivity in the sector.<sup>38</sup>

#### ***Rwanda's National Coffee Strategy***

The coffee sector is one of the leading sectors in Rwanda's economy accounting for \$68.7 million of exports in 2018, up 7.2 from the previous year.<sup>39</sup> This growth has largely been driven by the government's 1993-2003 National Coffee Strategy, which transformed Rwanda as producer of mediocre coffee to being recognized for producing high quality, premium priced coffee.<sup>40</sup> With the coffee sector on the verge of collapse in the late 1990s, Rwanda's National Coffee Strategy aimed to resolve some of the primary issues facing the sector, including "low skills, minimal technology adoption and a lack of coordination among actors along the value chain."<sup>41</sup> To solve these challenges, the government of Rwanda liberalized the sector, collaborating with international donors and the private sector to improve the branding and quality of the coffee by modifying the framework of production, supporting the development of cooperatives, and facilitating international buyer relations.<sup>42</sup> To do this, the Strategy prioritized the improvement in agriculture technology and increased production.<sup>43</sup> More specifically, the government provided the sector with "material and technical support to growers and processors, distributing

35 Julian Hatttem, "Kagame Seems Set to Win Again in Rwanda. But Is He a 'miracle Man' or a Nascent Dictator?" *The Washington Post*, 2017.

36 "GDP (Current US\$).", Data, Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

37 International Trade Administration, 2019. *export.gov*. U.S. Department of Commerce.

38 Ngabitsinze Jean Chrysostome, 2012. "The Rwandan Coffee Sector: out of the Ordinary." *Paris, L'Harmattan*.

39 International Trade Administration, 2019. *export.gov*. U.S. Department of Commerce.

40 Karol C Boudreaux, "A Better Brew for Success: Economic Liberalization in Rwanda's Coffee Sector" *Yes Africa Can: Success Stories from a Dynamic Continent/World Bank* (2010): 185; Ngabitsinze Jean Chrysostome, 2012. "The Rwandan Coffee Sector: out of the Ordinary." *Paris, L'Harmattan*.

41 The World Bank, 2016. World Economic Forum, *Case 14: Rwanda Coffee Sector*, World Bank Group.

42 Karol C Boudreaux, "A Better Brew for Success: Economic Liberalization in Rwanda's Coffee Sector" *Yes Africa Can: Success Stories from a Dynamic Continent/World Bank* (2010): 185.

43 The World Bank, 2016. World Economic Forum, *Case 14: Rwanda Coffee Sector*, World Bank Group.

fertilizer, as well as promulgating and enforcing regulations.”<sup>44</sup> The government also introduced coffee competitions to develop the palettes and standards of coffee farmers to improve quality.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, workforce development programs provided training within the sector to improve the installation and operation of coffee-washing stations, refine the cherry sorting and selection process, and establish administrative and financial management.<sup>46</sup>

Rwanda’s National Coffee Strategy not only aimed to liberalize the sector to increase sectoral growth and competition, but it also demonstrates how the government’s intervention in defining and facilitating a plan for the sector promulgated its growth. As noted by Guariso, Ngabitsinze, and Verpoorten, at the time of the writing, there were over 200 washing stations in the country, demonstrating significant competition.<sup>47</sup> Entrepreneurship has flourished as a result of Rwanda’s industry liberalizations,<sup>48</sup> demonstrating the Rwandan government’s response to providing opportunities that enhance economic freedom. This indicates the success of the government’s intervention in the targeted allocation of resources for the sector that facilitated the resulting growth and subsequent entrepreneurship.

Although Rwanda’s National Coffee Strategy has demonstrated success in contributing to the economic growth that Rwanda has experienced over the last twenty years, it has not been without major hurdles. In the next section, I will explore the challenges faced by the coffee sector in Rwanda, and take a look at how further reforms and liberalization, components that demonstrate a slow transition to instilling democratic values, could enable further growth in the sector.

### **Is Democracy Next?**

As explored above, the implementation of Rwanda’s National Coffee Sector made significant strides of improvements in the sector, ultimately leading to the sector contributing to the economy as a major source of exports. The enhancement of this sector has provided income for over 355,000 farming households in the country and Rwanda has become recognized globally as a major producer of specialty coffee.<sup>49</sup> However, while growth in this sector, largely facilitated by programs implemented by the government alongside the support of international donors, the private sector, and foreign buyers, as

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44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ngabitsinze Jean Chrysostome, 2012. “The Rwandan Coffee Sector: out of the Ordinary.” *Paris, L’Harmattan*.

48 Jutta M Tobias, Johanna Mair, and Celestina Barbosa-Leiker. “Toward a Theory of Transformative Entrepreneurship: Poverty Reduction and Conflict Resolution in Rwanda’s Entrepreneurial Coffee Sector.” *Journal of Business Venturing* 28, no. 6 (2013): 729.

49 Daniel C. Clay, Aniseh S. Bro, Ruth Ann Church, David L. Ortega, and Alfred R. Bizoza, “Farmer Incentives and Value Chain Governance: Critical Elements to Sustainable Growth in Rwanda’s Coffee Sector.” *Journal of Rural Studies* 63 (2018): 200.

Clay notes, much of the country's coffee producers have failed to become recipients of this newfound prosperity, largely due to their inability to enact influence over the supply chain.<sup>50</sup> With little ability to affect positive change or voice their dissatisfaction within the sector, many farmers are allowing their production to falter, leading to low productivity and stagnated production or are choosing to exit the sector altogether.<sup>51</sup> The sector has failed to provide incentives to farmers largely due to the Rwandan government's control over the cherry floor price.<sup>52</sup> As noted by Clay this regulatory process not only eliminates cherry competition, but also limits the incentives that drive quality and productivity improvements.<sup>53</sup> Zoning policies also negatively impact competition in the region,<sup>54</sup> again, de-incentivizing producers and resulting in poor levels of productivity and quality.

Rwanda's economic growth at large, but particularly in the coffee sector, was catapulted by the sectoral reforms implemented by the government. This demonstration of authoritarian capitalism allowed the government to allocate resources effectively and focus their attention on sectors where the country could demonstrate competitive advantage, ultimately leading to Rwanda becoming a compelling trade partner in quality coffee. Given that the sector is now well-established, relative to its beginning twenty years ago, the government's transition to a more democratic allocation of freedoms within the sector is essential for the continuity of its growth. Lifting on the control over the price floor on cherry could provide the incentives needed by farmers to induce competition and continued growth in the sector. As the sector continues to develop, the Rwandan government will need to accede to the growing demands of economic and personal freedoms that will encourage growth in the well-defined sectors originally initiated by the government.

Other countries' economic growth has demonstrated how enhanced market liberalizations embedded in shifts towards democratization can sustain long-term growth. As an example, South Korea's growth, as previously highlighted, was dependent initially upon authoritarian measures to facilitate production in manufacturing sectors, namely in textiles, plywood, electronics, synthetics, and chemical industries.<sup>55</sup> Since the country's economic transformation began 50 years ago, South Korea has transitioned into a stable liberal democracy with sustained long term economic growth. GDP has grown 40,000 per cent since 1960.<sup>56</sup> As Alamdari notes, as economic growth is facilitated under authoritarian regimes, social advancement promulgates increasing economic demands and increased

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50 Ibid, 201.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid, 202.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Kazem Alamdari, "Is Democracy a Prerequisite of Economic Growth?" *Michigan Sociological Review*, no. 8 (1994):20.

56 "GDP (Current US\$) - Korea, Rep." Data. Accessed April 9, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=KR>.

participation rights in decision making.<sup>57</sup> Alternatively, Ghana represents an example where the autocrat government's refusal to liberalize cocoa markets resulted in decreased growth rates across the country. In this case, because the government refused to lift the control on cocoa pricing, farmers, facing lower producer prices, were not incentivized to plant as much of the crop or opted to sell on the black market.<sup>58</sup> When Jerry Rawlings, then dictator, finally agreed to allow producers to control the cocoa price, Ghana's production recovered leading them to once again become a leading cocoa producer.<sup>59</sup> These examples highlight the necessity for autocratic governments to respond to increasing demands for liberalizing markets in order to sustain long-term economic growth. Such response will eventually support a transition to democratization as economic growth increases.

As demonstrated throughout this paper, although democracy is not necessary for inducing economic growth, continued liberalization of well-established sectors over time and a slow transition to democracy are necessary to sustain economic growth over time. As indicated by Moyo, "democracy can sustain longer as per capita income increases."<sup>60</sup>

### Conclusion

The analysis of Rwanda's interventionist market reforms in the coffee sector demonstrates how authoritarian capitalism can induce growth in the economy. This example highlights that while democracy is not a prerequisite for growth, the long-term sustainability of economic growth patterns requires increasing liberalization and freedoms within economic sectors, and ultimately, a transition to democracy. This pattern of growth, from authoritarian interventionism to democratic liberalization, as a method of economic growth, has been proven through the examples of the East Asian miracle economies, and further modelled by countries including China and Rwanda. Although Rwanda will need to respond to demands for increasing personal and economic freedoms across the country in order to sustain its growth, the method of inducing this growth has been largely reliant on autocratic market-led reforms.

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57 Kazem Alamdari, "Is Democracy a Prerequisite of Economic Growth?" *Michigan Sociological Review*, no. 8 (1994):20.

58 William Easterly, *The Tyranny of Experts : Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor*. (New York: Basic Books, a Member of the Perseus Book Group, 2013):319.

59 Ibid.

60 Dambisa Moyo, *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth - and How to Fix It*. (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 118-119.

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